

September 1, 1997 Project Update

Purpose of this update

The purpose of this update is to provide the interested public with current information about the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program.

Recent program activities and decisions

The Record of Decision authorizing the reintroduction of Mexican wolves into the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area in Arizona and New Mexico was signed in March 1997. The first releases are planned for early 1998.

Interagency coordination. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) signed a cooperative agreement with the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) in July. The agreement provides for full cooperation of the AZGFD in the wolf recovery program, and for an AZGFD and a FWS field biologist to work together to implement wolf reintroduction and management activities in Arizona and New Mexico. The FWS and the USDA Wildlife Services (WS - formerly Animal Damage Control) are negotiating a similar cooperative agreement that will provide for a WS wolf management specialist position. Biologists from these three agencies will form the initial field team implementing the reintroduction.

An interagency planning team, with representatives from the FWS, the USDA Forest Service (FS), WS, AZGFD, and Apache County was convened to analyze and select sites for building temporary soft-release pens for Mexican wolves. The objective of this joint effort is to identify sites that can be used to hold wolves for about 8 weeks prior to releasing them within the primary recovery zone in the Apache National Forest. Sites will be chosen to give wolves the best possible opportunity to find native prey and appropriate habitat requirements after release, with the minimum impact on traditional uses of the area. Criteria being used to evaluate sites include: distance from recovery area boundaries; prey density; livestock use; security; hunting and other recreational uses; accessibility; and water. Seven potential sites have been identified and evaluated by the team. Comments from local communities and other agencies were solicited in August. Experts from the Northern Rockies wolf reintroduction project are being consulted to benefit from their experiences. The team will re-convene in early September to review all existing information and select three sites to be used in 1998, identify additional sites to be held in reserve for future releases, and eliminate any sites that are determined to be unsuitable (See map on page 3).

Public interaction planning. The FWS completed a public interaction needs assessment in June. The purpose was to seek information directly from affected local communities about their information needs and the types of interaction activities that will be most meaningful to them as the reintroduction project is implemented. The information is being used to develop a public interaction plan for the reintroduction project. Seventeen individuals, representing a broad spectrum of viewpoints (primarily from local

communities), were interviewed in May 1997 by an independent public interaction specialist. The following issues were identified as being of concern to local people:

Wolf management issues

- Inability to predict behavior of released wolves
- Livestock depredation
- Potential depredation on existing wildlife and domestic animals other than livestock

Program management issues

- Responsiveness and/or reliability of FWS information
- How problem wolves will be managed
- Who will monitor the FWS (as the program moves forward)
- Relations and effective coordination between the FWS and other agencies

The assessment also provided "findings" based on information received from the people interviewed during this project. The findings describe information needs of local communities; identify areas of needed improvement in FWS interactions with local communities, other agencies, and local governments; and provide a variety of specific ideas on how the FWS can work more effectively with the interested public as this program moves forward.

The FWS circulated the needs assessment to elected officials, interest groups, and agencies, and have discussed the findings with the agencies that will be cooperating with the FWS in the wolf reintroduction program, including the USDA-FS, WS, AZGFD, and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish. We are currently drafting a public interaction plan that will detail specific communication and interaction activities the FWS and cooperators propose to implement during the reintroduction program. The draft plan will be available for review and the final plan will be available to all interested parties.

Time line for reintroduction activities

March-June 1997

- Review and revise draft rule for the nonessential experimental population
- Conduct interviews and meet with local governments for public interaction needs assessment

June-Sept 1997

- Brief agencies and distribute the needs assessment
- Develop working agreements with the cooperating agencies
- Evaluate and select soft-release pens

Oct-Dec 1997

- Design and construct pens

- Publish final rule for the nonessential experimental population
- Complete draft plan for public interaction
- Assemble interagency working group and field management team

Dec-Jan 1997

- Final evaluation and selection of release candidate wolves
- Complete final plan for public interaction

Jan-April 1997-98

- Wolves moved to release pens and held for approximately 8 weeks*

Mar-May 1998

- Wolves released from pens and monitored*

*An adaptive management strategy (meaning that agencies will use emerging current information to make the best possible decisions) will be used for this and other processes in the wolf reintroduction effort. The exact time when wolves will enter, be held, or be released from pens will be decided based upon the best judgement of the management team at that time, and may vary for each release site.

Long term goals for the program

The FWS projects that it will require 3-5 years of reintroducing captive-reared wolves before natural reproduction can sustain population growth. In approximately 10 years, the wolf population is expected to reach the recovery objective of about 100 wolves throughout the Apache and Gila National Forests.

Captive population update

The current captive population of Mexican wolves has 178 individuals. Thirty-seven pups were successfully produced by 11 pairs in 1997, including 10 pups by three pairs in Mexico. The first offspring from Ghost Ranch x Certified lineages (12 pups from 2 pairs), and Aragon x Certified lineages (4 pups from one pair) were born this year. Two pairs of wolves at the FWS's captive management facility on Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge produced 5 pups.

Partnerships

The Turner Endangered Species Fund is cooperating with the FWS by building a captive management facility similar to that at Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge on the Ladder Ranch near Truth or Consequences, New Mexico.

The Julian Wolf Preserve in San Diego, California, has completed a facility that will receive captive Mexican wolves later this year. There are now 31 zoos and sanctuaries in the United States and Mexico that participate in captive management of Mexican wolves.

New or updated information materials available upon request from the FWS

- *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Mexican Wolf Home Page*. Many of our materials are now available through the Internet at <http://ifw2irm2.irm1r2.fws.gov/wolf/>
- *Mexican Wolf Recovery in the Southwest* (1 page)
- *Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about Mexican Wolf Reintroduction in the Southwest* (8 pages)
- *Kids Fact Sheet on the Mexican Wolf* (4 pages)
- *Public Interaction Needs Assessment* (27 pages)
- *Selection of Sites for Mexican Wolf Soft Release Pens - Questions and Answers* (5 pages)

Please contact us if you want to receive any of these materials. We also welcome your ideas about our written communications, our outreach program generally, and any specific suggestions you have about how to improve the project updates. Write:

Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

P.O. Box 1306

Albuquerque, NM 87103

*** Do you want to stay on our mailing list?** We will complete the process of revising our list by October 1. If you did not respond to our last request and you want to continue to receive updates, please write to us at the above address. Project updates will be posted on our web site.